

SUNZI-TZU

THE ART OF WAR

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SUNZI TZU

THE ART OF WAR

CHAPTER 1

ON ASSESSMENTS

Master Sun said:

War¹¹⁵ is a vital matter of state. It is the field on which life or death is determined and the road that leads to either survival or ruin, and must be examined with the greatest care.

Therefore, to gauge the outcome of war we must appraise the situation on the basis of the following five criteria, and compare the two sides by assessing their relative strengths. The first of the five criteria is the way (*tao*), the second is climate, the third is terrain, the fourth is command, and the fifth is regulation.

The way (*tao*) is what brings the thinking of the people in line with their superiors. Hence, you can send them to their deaths or let them live, and they will have no misgivings one way or the other. Climate is light and shadow, heat and cold, and the rotation of the seasons.¹¹⁶

Terrain refers to the fall of the land,¹¹⁷ proximate distances, difficulty of passage, the degree of openness, and the viability of the land for de-ploying troops.

Command is a matter of wisdom, integrity, humanity, courage, and discipline.

And regulation entails organizational effectiveness, a chain of command, and a structure for logistical support.

All commanders are familiar with these five criteria, yet it is he who masters them who takes the victory, while he who does not will not prevail.

Therefore, to gauge the outcome of war we must compare the two sides by assessing their relative strengths. This is to ask the following questions:

Which ruler has the way (*tao*)?

Which commander has the greater ability?

Which side has the advantages of climate and terrain?

Which army follows regulations and obeys orders more strictly?

Which army has superior strength?

Whose officers and men are better trained?

Which side is more strict and impartial in meting out rewards and punishments?

On the basis of this comparison I know who will win and who will lose.

If you heed my assessments, dispatching troops into battle would mean certain victory, and I will stay. If you do not heed them, dispatching troops would mean certain defeat, and I will leave.¹¹⁸

Having heard what can be gained from my assessments, shape a strategic advantage (*shih*) from them to strengthen our position. By “strategic advantage” I mean making the most of favorable conditions (*yin*) and tilting the scales in our favor.

Warfare is the art (*tao*) of deceit. Therefore, when able, seem to be unable; when ready, seem unready; when nearby, seem far away; and when far away, seem near. If the enemy seeks some advantage, entice him with it. If he is in disorder, attack him and take him. If he is formidable, prepare against him. If he is strong, evade him. If he is incensed, provoke him. If he is humble, encourage his arrogance. If he is rested, wear him down. If he is internally harmonious, sow divisiveness in his ranks. Attack where he is not prepared; go by way of places where it would never occur to him you would go. These are the military strategist’s calculations for victory—they cannot be settled in advance.

It is by scoring many points that one wins the war beforehand in the temple rehearsal of the battle; it is by scoring few points that one loses the war beforehand in the temple rehearsal of the battle. The side that scores many points will win; the side that scores few points will not win, let alone the side that scores no points at all. When I examine it in this way, the outcome of the war becomes apparent.¹¹⁹

CHAPTER 2

ON WAGING BATTLE

Master Sun said:

The art of warfare is this:¹²⁰

For an army of one thousand fast four-horse chariots, one thousand four-horse leather-covered wagons, and one hundred thousand armor-clad troops, and for the provisioning of this army over a distance of a thousand *li*,¹²¹ what with expenses at home and on the field, including foreign envoys and advisors, materials such as glue and lacquer, and the maintenance of chariots and armor, only when you have in hand one thousand pieces of gold for each day can the hundred thousand troops be mobilized.

In joining battle, seek the quick victory. If battle is protracted, your weapons will be blunted and your troops demoralized. If you lay siege to a walled city, you exhaust your strength. If your armies are kept in the field for a long time, your national reserves will not suffice. Where you have blunted your weapons, demoralized your troops, exhausted your strength and depleted all available resources, the neighboring rulers will take advantage of your adversity to strike. And even with the wisest of counsel, you will not be able to turn the ensuing consequences to the good.

Thus in war, I have heard tell of a foolish haste, but I have yet to see a case of cleverly dragging on the hostilities. There has never been a state that has benefited from an extended war. Hence, if one is not fully cognizant of the evils of waging war, he cannot be fully cognizant either of how to turn it to best account.

The expert in using the military does not conscript soldiers more than once or transport his provisions repeatedly from home. He carries his military equipment with him, and commandeers (*yin*) his provisions from the enemy. Thus he has what he needs to feed his army.

A state is impoverished by its armies when it has to supply them at a great distance. To supply an army at a great distance is to impoverish one's people. On the other hand, in the vicinity of the armies, the price of goods goes up. Where goods are expensive, you exhaust your resources, and once you have exhausted your resources, you will be forced to increase district exactions for the military. All your strength is spent on the battlefield, and the families on the home front are left destitute. The toll to the people will have been some 70 percent of their property; the toll to the public coffers in terms of broken-down chariots and worn-out horses, body armor and helmets, crossbows and bolts, halberds and bucklers, lances and shields, draft oxen and heavy supply wagons will be some 60 percent of its reserves.

Therefore, the wise commander does his best to feed his army from enemy soil. To consume one measure of the enemy's provisions is equal to twenty of our own; to use up one bale of the enemy's fodder is equal to twenty of our own.

Killing the enemy is a matter of arousing the anger of our men; snatching the enemy's wealth is a matter of dispensing the spoils.¹²² Thus, in a chariot battle where more than ten war chariots have been captured, reward those who captured the first one and replace the enemy's flags and standards with our own. Mix the chariots in with our ranks and send them back into battle; provide for the captured soldiers and treat them well. This is called increasing our own strength in the process of defeating the army.

Hence, in war prize the quick victory, not the protracted engagement. Thus, the commander who understands war is the final arbiter of people's lives, and lord over the security of the state.

CHAPTER 3

PLANNING THE ATTACK

Master Sun said:

The art of warfare is this:

It is best to keep one's own state intact; to crush the enemy's state is only a second best. It is best to keep one's own army, battalion, company, or five-man squad intact; to crush the enemy's army, battalion, company, or five-man squad is only a second best.¹²³ So to win a hundred victories in a hundred battles is not the highest excellence; the highest excellence is to subdue the enemy's army without fighting at all.

Therefore, the best military policy is to attack strategies; the next to attack alliances; the next to attack soldiers; and the worst to assault walled cities.

Resort to assaulting walled cities only when there is no other choice. To construct siege screens and armored personnel vehicles and to assemble all of the military equipment and weaponry necessary will take three months, and to amass earthen mounds against the walls will take another three months. And if your commander, unable to control his temper, sends your troops swarming at the walls, your casualties will be one in three and still you will not have taken the city. This is the kind of calamity that befalls you in laying siege.

Therefore, the expert in using the military subdues the enemy's forces without going to battle, takes the enemy's walled cities without launching an attack, and crushes the enemy's state without a protracted war. He must use the principle of keeping himself intact to compete in the world. Thus,

his weapons will not be blunted and he can keep his edge intact. This then is the art of planning the attack.¹²⁴

Therefore the art of using troops is this:

When ten times the enemy strength, surround him; when five times, attack him; when double, engage him; when you and the enemy are equally matched, be able to divide him;¹²⁵ when you are inferior in numbers, be able to take the defensive; and when you are no match for the enemy, be able to avoid him. Thus what serves as secure defense against a small army will only be captured by a large one.¹²⁶

The commander is the side-guard on the carriage of state.¹²⁷ Where this guard is in place, the state will certainly be strong; where it is defective, the state will certainly be weak.

There are three ways in which the ruler can bring grief to his army:¹²⁸

To order an advance, not realizing the army is in no position to do so, or to order a retreat, not realizing the army is in no position to withdraw—this is called “hobbling the army.”

To interfere in the administration of the army while being ignorant of its internal affairs will confuse officers and soldiers alike.

To interfere in military assignments while being ignorant of exigencies will lose him the confidence of his men.

Once his army has become confused and he has lost the confidence of his men, aggression from his neighboring rulers will be upon him. This is called sowing disorder in your own ranks and throwing away the victory.

Therefore there are five factors in anticipating which side will win:

The side that knows when to fight and when not to will take the victory.

The side that understands how to deal with numerical superiority and inferiority in the deployment of troops will take the victory.

The side that has superiors and subordinates united in purpose will take the victory.

The side that fields a fully prepared army against one that is not will take the victory.

The side on which the commander is able and the ruler does not interfere will take the victory.

These five factors are the way (*tao*) of anticipating victory.

Thus it is said:

He who knows the enemy and himself
Will never in a hundred battles be at risk;

He who does not know the enemy but knows himself
Will sometimes win and sometimes lose;
He who knows neither the enemy nor himself
Will be at risk in every battle.¹²⁹

STRATEGIC POSITIONS

(*HsING*)¹³⁰

Master Sun said:

Of old the expert in battle would first make himself invincible and then wait for the enemy to expose his vulnerability. Invincibility depends on oneself; vulnerability lies with the enemy.¹³¹ Therefore the expert in battle can make himself invincible, but cannot guarantee for certain the vulnerability of the enemy. Hence it is said:

Victory can be anticipated,
But it cannot be forced.

Being invincible lies with defense; the vulnerability of the enemy comes with the attack.¹³² If one assumes a defensive posture, it is because the enemy's strength is overwhelming; if one launches the attack, it is because the enemy's strength is deficient.¹³³ The expert at defense conceals himself in the deepest recesses of the earth; the expert on the attack strikes from out of the highest reaches of the heavens. Thus he is able to both protect himself and to take the complete victory.

To anticipate the victory is not going beyond the understanding of the common run; it is not the highest excellence. To win in battle so that the whole world says "Excellent!" is not the highest excellence. Hence, to lift an autumn hair is no mark of strength; to see the sun and moon is no mark of clear-sightedness; to hear a thunder clap is no mark of keen hearing. He whom the ancients called an expert in battle gained victory where victory was easily gained. Thus the battle of the expert is never an excep-

tional victory, nor does it win him reputation for wisdom or credit for courage.¹³⁴ His victories in battle are unerring.¹³⁵ Unerring means that he acts where victory is certain, and conquers an enemy that has already lost.

Therefore, the expert in battle takes his stand on ground that is unsailable, and does not miss his chance to defeat the enemy. For this reason, the victorious army only enters battle after having first won the victory, while the defeated army only seeks victory after having first entered the fray.¹³⁶

The expert in using the military builds upon the way (*tao*) and holds fast to military regulations,¹³⁷ and thus is able to be the arbiter of victory and defeat.¹³⁸

Factors in the art of warfare are: First, calculations; second, quantities; third, logistics; fourth, the balance of power; and fifth, the possibility of victory. Calculations are based on the terrain, estimates of available quantities of goods are based on these calculations, logistical strength is based on estimates of available quantities of goods, the balance of power is based on logistical strength, and the possibility of victory is based on the balance of power.

Thus a victorious army is like weighing in a full hundredweight against a few ounces, and a defeated army is like pitting a few ounces against a hundredweight.¹³⁹ It is a matter of strategic positioning (*hsing*) that the army that has this weight of victory on its side, in launching its men into battle, can be likened to the cascading of pent-up waters thundering through a steep gorge.¹⁴⁰

CHAPTER 5

STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE (*SHIH*)

Master Sun said:

In general, it is organization¹⁴¹ that makes managing many soldiers the same as managing a few. It is communication with flags and pennants¹⁴² that makes fighting with many soldiers the same as fighting with a few. It is “surprise” (*ch’i*) and “straightforward” (*cheng*) operations that enable one’s army to withstand the full assault of the enemy force¹⁴³ and remain undefeated.¹⁴⁴ It is the distinction between “weak points” and “strong points” that makes one’s army falling upon the enemy a whetstone being hurled at eggs.

Generally in battle use the “straightforward” to engage the enemy and the “surprise” to win the victory. Thus the expert at delivering the surprise assault is as boundless as the heavens and earth, and as inexhaustible as the rivers and seas.¹⁴⁵ Like the sun and moon, he sets only to rise again; like the four seasons, he passes only to return again.

There are no more than five cardinal notes, yet in combination, they produce more sounds than could possibly be heard; there are no more than five cardinal colors, yet in combination, they produce more shades and hues than could possibly be seen; there are no more than five cardinal tastes, yet in combination, they produce more flavors than could possibly be tasted. For gaining strategic advantage (*shih*) in battle, there are no more than “surprise” and “straightforward” operations, yet in combination, they produce inexhaustible possibilities. “Surprise” and “straightforward” operations give rise to each other endlessly just as a ring is without a beginning or an end.¹⁴⁶ And who can exhaust their possibilities?

That the velocity of cascading water can send boulders bobbing about is due to its strategic advantage (*shih*). That a bird of prey when it strikes¹⁴⁷ can smash its victim to pieces is due to its timing. So it is with the expert at battle that his strategic advantage (*shih*) is channeled and his timing is precise. His strategic advantage (*shih*) is like a drawn crossbow and his timing is like releasing the trigger. Even amidst the tumult and the clamor of battle, in all its confusion, he cannot be confused. Even amidst the melee and the brawl of battle, with positions shifting every which way, he cannot be defeated.

Disorder is born from order; cowardice from courage; weakness from strength. The line between disorder and order lies in logistics (*shu*); between cowardice and courage, in strategic advantage (*shih*); and between weakness and strength, in strategic positioning (*hsing*). Thus the expert at getting the enemy to make his move shows himself (*hsing*), and the enemy is certain to follow. He baits the enemy, and the enemy is certain to take it. In so doing,¹⁴⁸ he moves the enemy, and lies in wait for him with his full force.

The expert at battle seeks his victory from strategic advantage (*shih*) and does not demand it from his men. He is thus able to select the right men and exploit the strategic advantage (*shih*).¹⁴⁹ He who exploits the strategic advantage (*shih*) sends his men into battle like rolling logs and boulders. It is the nature of logs and boulders that on flat ground, they are stationary, but on steep ground, they roll; the square in shape tends to stop but the round tends to roll. Thus, that the strategic advantage (*shih*) of the expert commander in exploiting his men in battle can be likened to rolling round boulders down a steep ravine thousands of feet high says something about his strategic advantage (*shih*).¹⁵⁰

CHAPTER 6

WEAK POINTS AND STRONG POINTS

Master Sun said:

Generally he who first occupies the field of battle to await the enemy will be rested; he who comes later and hastens into battle will be weary. Thus the expert in battle moves the enemy, and is not moved by him. Getting the enemy to come of his own accord is a matter of making things easy for him; stopping him from coming is a matter of obstructing him. Thus being able to wear down a well-rested enemy, to starve one that is well-provisioned, and to move one that is settled, lies in going by way of places where the enemy must hasten in defense.¹⁵¹

To march a thousand *li* without becoming weary is because one marches through territory where there is no enemy presence. To attack with the confidence of taking one's objective is because one attacks what the enemy does not defend. To defend with the confidence of keeping one's charge secure is because one defends where the enemy will not attack.¹⁵² Thus against the expert in the attack, the enemy does not know where to defend, and against the expert in defense, the enemy does not know where to strike.

So veiled and subtle,
To the point of having no form (*hsing*);
So mysterious and miraculous,
To the point of making no sound.
Therefore he can be arbiter of the enemy's fate.

at what he must rescue. If we do not want to fight, the enemy cannot engage us, even though we have no more around us than a drawn line, because we divert him to a different objective.

If we can make the enemy show his position (*hsing*) while concealing ours from him, we will be at full force where he is divided.¹⁵³ If our army is united as one and the enemy's is fragmented, in using the undivided whole to attack his one, we are many to his few. If we are able to use many to strike few, anyone we take the battle to will be in desperate circumstances.¹⁵⁴

The place we have chosen to give the enemy battle must be kept from him. If he cannot anticipate us, the positions the enemy must prepare to defend will be many. And if the positions he must prepare to defend are many, then any unit we engage in battle will be few in number.

Thus if the enemy makes preparations by reinforcing his numbers at the front, his rear is weakened; if he makes preparations at the rear, his front is weakened; if he makes them on his left flank, his right is weakened; if he makes them on his right flank, his left is weakened. To be prepared everywhere is to be weak everywhere.

One is weak because he makes preparations against others; he has strength because he makes others prepare against him.

Thus if one can anticipate the place and the day of battle, he can march a thousand *li* to join the battle. But if one cannot anticipate either the place or the day of battle, his left flank cannot even rescue his right, or his right his left; his front cannot even rescue his rear, or his rear his front. How much more is this so when your reinforcements are separated by at least a few *li*, or even tens of *li*.

The way I estimate it, even though the troops of Yüeh are many, what good is this to them in respect to victory?¹⁵⁵ Thus it is said: Victory can be created. For even though the enemy has the strength of numbers, we can prevent him from fighting us.

Therefore, analyze the enemy's battle plan to understand its merits and its weaknesses; provoke him to find out the pattern of his movements; make him show himself (*hsing*) to discover the viability of his battle position; skirmish with him to find out where he is strong and where he is vulnerable.

The ultimate skill in taking up a strategic position (*hsing*) is to have no form (*hsing*).¹⁵⁶ If your position is formless (*hsing*), the most carefully concealed spies will not be able to get a look at it, and the wisest counsellors will not be able to lay plans against it. I present the rank and file with victories gained through (*yin*) strategic positioning (*hsing*), yet they are not able to understand them. Everyone knows the position (*hsing*) that has won me victory, yet none fathom how I came to settle on this winning po-

In advancing he cannot be resisted because he bursts through the enemy's weak points; in withdrawing he cannot be pursued because, being so quick, he cannot be caught.

Thus, if we want to fight, the enemy has no choice but to engage us, even though safe behind his high walls and deep moats, because we strike

sition (*hsing*). Thus one's victories in battle cannot be repeated—they take their form (*hsing*) in response to inexhaustibly changing circumstances.

The positioning (*hsing*) of troops can be likened to water: Just as the flow of water avoids high ground and rushes to the lowest point, so on the path to victory avoid the enemy's strong points and strike where he is weak.¹⁵⁷ As water varies its flow according to (*yin*) the fall of the land, so an army varies its method of gaining victory according to (*yin*) the enemy.

Thus an army does not have fixed strategic advantages (*shih*) or an invariable position (*hsing*).¹⁵⁸ To be able to take the victory by varying one's position according to (*yin*) the enemy's is called being inscrutable (*shen*).¹⁵⁹

Thus, of the five phases (*wu hsing*), none is the constant victor; of the four seasons, none occupies a constant position; the days are both short and long; the moon waxes and wanes.¹⁶⁰

CHAPTER 7

ARMED CONTEST

Master Sun said:

The art of using troops is this: In the process of the commander's receiving his orders from the ruler, assembling his armies, mobilizing the population for war, and setting up his camp facing the enemy, there is nothing of comparable difficulty to the armed contest itself. What is difficult in the armed contest is to turn the long and tortuous route into the direct, and to turn adversity into advantage. Thus, making the enemy's road long and tortuous, lure him along it by baiting him with easy gains. Set out after he does, yet arrive before him. This is to understand the tactic of converting the tortuous and the direct.

Armed contest can be both a source of advantage and of danger.¹⁶¹ If you mobilize your entire force to contend for some advantage, you arrive too late; if you abandon your base camp to contend for advantage, your equipment and stores will be lost. For this reason, if an army were to stow its armor and set off in haste, and stopping neither day nor night, force-march at double time for a hundred *li* to contend for some advantage, its commanders would all be taken, its strongest men would be out in front, the exhausted ones would lag behind, and as a rule only one tenth of its strength would reach the target.

Were it to travel fifty *li* at such a pace to contend for some advantage, the commander of the advance force would be lost, and as a rule only half of its strength would reach the target. Were it to travel thirty *li* at such a pace to contend for some advantage, only two thirds of its strength would reach the target. For this reason, if an army is without its equipment and

stores, it will perish; if it is without provisions, it will perish; if it is without its material support, it will perish.

*[Therefore, unless you know the intentions of the rulers of the neighboring states, you cannot enter into preparatory alliances with them; unless you know the lay of the land—its mountains and forests, its passes and natural hazards, its wetlands and swamps—you cannot deploy the army on it; unless you can employ local scouts, you cannot turn the terrain to your advantage.]*¹⁶²

Therefore, in warfare rely on deceptive maneuvers to establish your ground, calculate advantages in deciding your movements, and divide up and consolidate your forces to make your strategic changes.

Thus, advancing at a pace, such an army is like the wind; slow and majestic, it is like a forest; invading and plundering, it is like fire; sedentary, it is like a mountain; unpredictable, it is like a shadow; moving, it is like lightning and thunder.

In plundering the countryside, divide up your numbers;¹⁶³ in extending your territory, divide up and hold the strategic positions; weigh the pros and cons before moving into action.

He who first understands the tactic of converting the tortuous and the direct will take the victory. This is the art of armed contest.¹⁶⁴

*The Book of Military Policies*¹⁶⁵ states: It is because commands cannot be heard in the din of battle that drums and gongs are used; it is because units cannot identify each other in battle that flags and pennants are used. Thus, in night battle make extensive use of torches and drums, and in battle during the day make extensive use of flags and pennants.¹⁶⁶ Drums, gongs, flags, and pennants are the way to coordinate the ears and eyes of the men.¹⁶⁷ Once the men have been consolidated as one body, the courageous will not have to advance alone, and the cowardly will not get to retreat alone.¹⁶⁸ This is the art of employing large numbers of troops.

An entire enemy army can be demoralized, and its commander can be made to lose heart.¹⁶⁹ Now, in the morning of the war, the enemy's morale is high; by noon, it begins to flag; by evening, it has drained away.¹⁷⁰ Thus the expert in using the military avoids the enemy when his morale is high, and strikes when his morale has flagged and has drained away. This is the way to manage morale.

Use your proper order to await the enemy's disorder; use your calmness to await his clamor. This is the way to manage the heart-and-mind.

Use your closeness to the battlefield to await the far-off enemy; use your well-rested troops to await his fatigued; use your well-fed troops to await his hungry. This is the way to manage strength.

Do not intercept an enemy that is perfectly uniform in its array of banners; do not launch the attack on an enemy that is full and disciplined in its formations. This is the way to manage changing conditions.

Therefore, the art of using troops is this:

Do not attack an enemy who has the high ground; do not go against an enemy that has his back to a hill; do not follow an enemy that feigns retreat; do not attack the enemy's finest; do not swallow the enemy's bait; do not obstruct an enemy returning home; in surrounding the enemy, leave him a way out; do not press an enemy that is cornered. This is the art of using troops. (465 characters)¹⁷¹

CHAPTER 8

ADAPTING TO THE NINE CONTINGENCIES (*PIEN*)¹⁷²

Master Sun said:

The art of using troops is this: When the commander receives his orders from the ruler, assembles his armies, and mobilizes the population for war,¹⁷³ he should not make camp on difficult terrain;¹⁷⁴ he should join with his allies on strategically vital intersections;¹⁷⁵ he should not linger on cut-off terrain;¹⁷⁶ he should have contingency plans on terrain vulnerable to ambush;¹⁷⁷ and he should take the fight to the enemy on terrain from which there is no way out.¹⁷⁸ There are roadways not to be traveled,¹⁷⁹ armies not to be attacked,¹⁸⁰ walled cities not to be assaulted,¹⁸¹ territory not to be contested,¹⁸² and commands from the ruler not to be obeyed.¹⁸³

Thus, a commander fully conversant with the advantages to be gained in adapting to these nine contingencies will know how to employ troops; a commander who is not, even if he knows the lay of the land, will not be able to use it to his advantage. One who commands troops without knowing the art of adapting to these nine contingencies, even if he knows the five advantages,¹⁸⁴ will not be able to get the most from his men.

For this reason, the deliberations of the wise commander are sure to assess jointly both advantages and disadvantages. In taking full account of what is advantageous, he can fulfill his responsibilities; in taking full account of what is disadvantageous, his difficulties become resolvable.

For this reason, to subjugate neighboring states, use the threat of injury; to keep them in service, drive them on; to lure them out, use the prospect of gain.

The art of using troops is this:¹⁸⁵

Do not depend on the enemy not coming; depend rather on being ready for him. Do not depend on the enemy not attacking; depend rather on having a position that cannot be attacked.

There are five traits that are dangerous in a commander:¹⁸⁶ If he has a reckless disregard for life, he can be killed; if he is determined to live at all costs, he can be captured; if he has a volatile temper, he can be provoked; if he is a man of uncompromising honor, he is open to insult; if he loves his people, he can be easily troubled and upset. These five traits are generally faults in a commander, and can prove disastrous in the conduct of war. Since an army's being routed and its commander slain is invariably the consequence of these five dangerous traits, they must be given careful consideration.

DEPLOYING THE ARMY

Master Sun said:

In positioning your armies and assessing the enemy:

Pass through the mountains keeping to the valleys; pitch camp on high ground facing the sunny side; and joining battle in the hills, do not ascend to engage the enemy.¹⁸⁷ This is positioning an army when in the mountains.

Crossing water, you must move to distance yourself from it. When the invading army crosses water in his advance, do not meet him in the water. It is to your advantage to let him get halfway across and then attack him. Wanting to join the enemy in battle, do not meet his invading force near water. Take up a position on high ground facing the sunny side that is not downstream from the enemy. This is positioning an army when near water.

Crossing salt marshes, simply get through them in all haste and without delay. If you engage the enemy's force on the salt marshes, you must take your position near grass and water and with your back to the woods. This is positioning an army when on salt marshes.

On the flatlands, position yourself on open ground, with your right flank backing on high ground, and with dangerous ground in front and safe ground behind.¹⁸⁸ This is positioning an army when on flatlands.

Gaining the advantageous position for his army in these four different situations was the way the Yellow Emperor defeated the emperors of the four quarters.¹⁸⁹

Generally speaking, an army prefers high ground and dislikes the low, prizes the sunny side and shuns the shady side, seeks a place in which food and water are readily available and ample to supply its needs, and wants to be free of the numerous diseases. These conditions mean certain victory. Encountering rises, hills, embankments, and dikes, you must position yourself on the sunny side and on your right flank have your back to the slope. This is an advantage for the troops, and is exploiting whatever help the terrain affords.

When it is raining upstream and churning waters descend, do not try to cross, but wait for the waters to subside.¹⁹⁰

Encountering steep river gorges, natural wells, box canyons, dense ground cover, quagmires, or natural defiles,¹⁹¹ quit such places with haste. Do not approach them. In keeping our distance from them, we can maneuver the enemy near to them; in keeping them to our front, we can maneuver the enemy to have them at his back.

If the army is flanked by precipitous ravines, stagnant ponds, reeds and rushes, mountain forests, and tangled undergrowth, these places must be searched carefully and repeatedly, for they are where ambushes are laid and spies are hidden.

If the enemy is close and yet quiet,
He occupies a strategic position;
If he is at a distance and yet acts provocatively,
He wants us to advance.
Where he has positioned himself on level ground,
He is harboring some advantage;
If there is movement in the trees,
He is coming;
If there are many blinds in the bushes,
He is looking to confuse us;
If birds take to flight,
He is lying in ambush;
If animals stampede in fear,
He is mounting a surprise attack;
If the dust peaks up high,
His chariots are coming;
If the dust spreads out low to the ground,
His infantry is coming;
If the dust reaches out in scattered ribbons,
His firewood details have been dispatched;
If a few clouds of dust come and go,

He is making camp.
If his envoys are modest of word yet he continues to increase his readiness for war,
He will advance;
If his language is belligerent and he advances aggressively,
He will withdraw;
If his light chariots move out first
And take up position on the flanks,
He is moving into formation;
If he has suffered no setback and yet sues for peace,¹⁹²
He is plotting;
If he moves rapidly with his troops in formation,¹⁹³
He is setting the time for battle;
If some of his troops advance and some retreat,
He is seeking to lure us forward.
If the enemy soldiers lean on their weapons,
They are hungry;
If those sent for water first drink themselves,
They are thirsty;
If there is an advantage to be had yet they do not advance to secure it,
They are weary;
Where birds gather,
The enemy position is unoccupied;
Where there are shouts in the night,
The enemy is frightened;
Where there are disturbances in the ranks,
The enemy commander is not respected;
Where their flags and pennants are shifted about,
The enemy is in disorder;
Where his officers are easily angered,
The enemy is exhausted.
Where the enemy feeds his horses grain and his men meat,
And where his men no longer bother to hang up their water vessels,
Or return to camp,
The now-desperate enemy is ready to fight to the death.
Where, hemming and hawing,
The enemy commander speaks to his subordinates in a meek and halting voice,
He has lost his men.
Meting out too many rewards
Means the enemy is in trouble,
And meting out too many punishments
Means he is in dire straits.

The commander who erupts violently at his subordinates,
Only then to fear them,
Is totally inept.
When the enemy's emissary comes with conciliatory words
He wants to end hostilities.

When an angry enemy confronts you for an extended time, without either joining you in battle or quitting his position, you must watch him with the utmost care.

In war it is not numbers that give the advantage. If you do not advance recklessly, and are able to consolidate your own strength, get a clear picture of the enemy's situation, and secure the full support of your men, it is enough. It is only the one who has no plan and takes his enemy lightly who is certain to be captured by him. If you punish troops who are not yet devoted to you, they will not obey, and if they do not obey, they are difficult to use. But once you have their devotion, if discipline is not enforced, you cannot use them either. Therefore, bring them together by treating them humanely and keep them in line with strict military discipline. This will assure their allegiance.

If commands are consistently enforced in the training of the men, they will obey; if commands are not enforced in their training, they will not obey. The consistent enforcement of commands promotes a complementary relationship between the commander and his men.

THE TERRAIN

Master Sun said:

Kinds of terrain include the accessible, that which entangles, that which leads to a stand-off, the narrow pass, the precipitous defile and the distant.

Terrain that both armies can approach freely is called accessible. On accessible terrain, the army that enters the battle having been first to occupy high ground on the sunny side and to establish convenient supply lines, fights with the advantage.

Terrain that allows your advance but hampers your return is entangling. On entangling ground, if you go out and engage the enemy when he is not prepared, you might defeat him. But when the enemy is prepared, if you go out and engage him and fail to defeat him, you will be hard-pressed to get out, and will be in trouble.

Terrain that when entered disadvantages both our side and the enemy is ground that will lead to a stand-off. On this kind of terrain, even if the enemy tempts us out, we must not take the bait, but should quit the position and withdraw. Having lured the enemy halfway out, we can then strike to our advantage.

With the narrow pass, if we can occupy it first, we must fully garrison it and await the enemy. Where the enemy has occupied it first, if he garrisons it completely, do not follow him, but if he fails to, we can go after him.

With the precipitous defile, if we can occupy it first, we must take the high ground on the sunny side and await the enemy. Where the enemy has occupied it first, quit the position and withdraw, and do not follow him.

When the enemy is at some distance, if the strategic advantages of both sides are about the same, it is not easy to provoke him to fight, and taking the battle to him is not to our advantage.

Now these are the six guidelines (*tao*) governing the use of terrain. They are the commander's utmost responsibility, and must be thoroughly investigated.

In warfare there is flight, insubordination, deterioration, ruin, chaos, and rout.¹⁹⁴ These six situations are not natural catastrophes but the fault of the commander.

Where the strategic advantages of both sides are about the same, for an army to attack an enemy ten times its size will result in flight.

If the troops are strong but the officers weak, the result will be insubordination.

If the officers are strong but the troops weak, the result will be deterioration.

If your ranking officers are angry and insubordinate and, on encountering the enemy, allow their rancor to spur them into unauthorized engagements so that their commander does not know the strength of his own forces, the result will be ruin.

If the commander is weak and lax, his instructions and leadership unenlightened, his officers and troops undisciplined, and his military formations in disarray, the result will be chaos.

If the commander, unable to assess his enemy, sends a small force to engage a large one, sends his weak troops to attack the enemy's best, and operates without a vanguard of crack troops, the result will be rout.

These are six ways (*tao*) to certain defeat. They are the commander's utmost responsibility, and must be thoroughly investigated.

Strategic position (*hsing*) is an ally in battle. To assess the enemy's situation and create conditions that lead to victory, to analyze natural hazards and proximate distances—this is the way (*tao*) of the superior commander.¹⁹⁵ He who fights with full knowledge of these factors is certain to win; he who fights without it is certain to lose.

Thus, if the way (*tao*) of battle guarantees you victory, it is right for you to insist on fighting even if the ruler has said not to; where the way (*tao*) of battle does not allow victory, it is right for you to refuse to fight even if the ruler has said you must.

Hence a commander who advances without any thought of winning personal fame and withdraws in spite of certain punishment, whose only concern is to protect his people and promote the interests of his ruler, is

the nation's treasure. Because he fusses over his men as if they were infants, they will accompany him into the deepest valleys; because he fusses over his men as if they were his own beloved sons, they will die by his side. If he is generous with them and yet they do not do as he tells them, if he loves them and yet they do not obey his commands, if he is so undisciplined with them that he cannot bring them into proper order, they will be like spoiled children who can be put to no good use at all.

To know our troops can attack and yet be unaware that the enemy is not open to attack, reduces our chances of victory to half; to know the enemy is open to attack and yet be unaware that our own troops cannot attack, reduces our chances of victory again to half; to know the enemy is open to attack and our troops can attack, and yet be unaware that the terrain does not favor us in battle, reduces the chances of victory once again to half.

Thus when one who understands war moves, he does not go the wrong way, and when he takes action, he does not reach a dead end.

Hence it is said:

Know the other, know yourself,
And the victory will not be at risk;
Know the ground, know the natural conditions,
And the victory can be total.¹⁹⁶

CHAPTER 11

THE NINE KINDS OF TERRAIN

Master Sun said:

In the art of employing troops, the kinds of terrain include scattering terrain, marginal terrain, contested terrain, intermediate terrain, the strategically vital intersection, critical terrain, difficult terrain, terrain vulnerable to ambush, and terrain from which there is no way out.

Where a feudal ruler does battle within his own territory, it is a terrain that permits the scattering of his troops.

Where one has penetrated only barely into enemy territory, it is marginal terrain.

Ground that gives us or the enemy the advantage in occupying it is contested terrain.

Ground accessible to both sides is intermediate terrain.

The territory of several neighboring states at which their borders meet is a strategically vital intersection. The first to reach it will gain the allegiance of the other states of the empire.

When an army has penetrated deep into enemy territory, and has many of the enemy's walled cities and towns at its back, it is on critical terrain.

Mountains and forests, passes and natural hazards, wetlands and swamps, and any such roads difficult to traverse constitute difficult terrain.

Ground that gives access through a narrow defile, and where exit is tortuous, allowing an enemy in small numbers to attack our main force, is terrain vulnerable to ambush.

Ground on which you will survive only if you fight with all your might, but will perish if you fail to do so, is terrain with no way out.

This being the case, do not fight on scattering terrain; do not stay on marginal terrain; do not attack the enemy on contested terrain; do not get cut off on intermediate terrain; form alliances with the neighboring states at strategically vital intersections; plunder the enemy's resources on critical terrain; press ahead on difficult terrain; devise contingency plans on terrain vulnerable to ambush; and on terrain from which there is no way out, take the battle to the enemy.

The commanders of old said to be expert at the use of the military were able to ensure that with the enemy:

His vanguard and rearguard could not relieve each other,
The main body of his army and its special detachments could not support each other,
Officers and men could not come to each other's aid,
And superiors and subordinates could not maintain their lines of communication.
The enemy forces when scattered could not regroup,
And when their army assembled, it could not form ranks.

If it was to the advantage of these expert commanders, they would move into action; if not, they would remain in place. Suppose I am asked: If the enemy, in great numbers and with strict discipline in the ranks, is about to advance on us, how do we deal with him? I would reply: If you get ahead of him to seize something he cannot afford to lose, he will do your bidding.

War is such that the supreme consideration is speed. This is to take advantage of what is beyond the reach of the enemy, to go by way of routes where he least expects you, and to attack where he has made no preparations.¹⁹⁷

The general methods of operation (*tao*) for an invading army are:

The deeper you penetrate into enemy territory, the greater the cohesion of your troops, and the less likely the host army will prevail over you.

Plunder the enemy's most fertile fields, and your army will have ample provisions.

Attend to the nourishment of your troops and do not let them get worn down; lift their morale and build up their strength.

Deploy your troops and plan out your strategies in such a way that the enemy cannot fathom your movements.

Throw your troops into situations from which there is no way out, and they will choose death over desertion. Once they are ready to die, how could you get less than maximum exertion from your officers and men?

Even where your troops are in the most desperate straits,
They will have no fear,
And with nowhere else to turn,
They will stand firm;
Having penetrated deep into enemy territory,
They are linked together,
And if need be,
They will fight.
For this reason, with no need of admonishment, they are vigilant;¹⁹⁸
Without compulsion, they carry out their duties;
Without tying them down, they are devoted;
With no need for orders, they follow army discipline.
Proscribe talk of omens and get rid of rumors,
And even to the death they will not retreat.

Our soldiers do not have an abundance of wealth, but it is not because they despise worldly goods; their life expectancy is not long, but it is not because they despise longevity. On the day these men are ordered into battle, those sitting have tears soaking their collars, and those lying on their backs have tears crossing on their cheeks. But throw them into a situation where there is no way out and they will show the courage of any Chuan Chu or Ts'ao Kuei.¹⁹⁹

Therefore, those who are expert at employing the military are like the "sudden striker." The "sudden striker" is a snake indigenous to Mount Heng.²⁰⁰ If you strike its head, its tail comes to its aid; if you strike its tail, its head comes to its aid; if you strike its middle, both head and tail come to its aid.²⁰¹

Suppose I am asked: Can troops be trained to be like this "sudden striker" snake? I would reply: They can. The men of Wu and Yüeh hate each other. Yet if they were crossing the river in the same boat and were caught by gale winds, they would go to each other's aid like the right hand helping the left.

For this reason, it has never been enough to depend on tethered horses and buried chariot wheels.²⁰² The object (*tao*) of military management is to effect a unified standard of courage. The principle of exploiting terrain is to get value from the soft as well as the hard.²⁰³ Thus the expert in using

the military leads his legions as though he were leading one person by the hand. The person cannot but follow.

As for the urgent business of the commander:

He is calm and remote, correct and disciplined. He is able to blinker the ears and eyes of his officers and men, and to keep people ignorant. He makes changes in his arrangements and alters his plans, keeping people in the dark.²⁰⁴ He changes his camp, and takes circuitous routes, keeping people from anticipating him. On the day he leads his troops into battle, it is like climbing up high and throwing away the ladder. He leads his troops deep into the territory of the neighboring states and releases the trigger.²⁰⁵ Like herding a flock of sheep, he drives them this way and that, so no one knows where they are going. He assembles the rank and file of his armies, and throws them into danger.

This then is the urgent business of the commander.

The measures needed to cope with the nine kinds of terrain, the advantages that can be gained by flexibility in maneuvering the army, and the basic patterns of the human character must all be thoroughly investigated.

The general methods of operation (*tao*) for an invading force are:

The deeper you penetrate into enemy territory, the greater the cohesion of your troops; the more shallow the penetration, the more easily you are scattered. When you quit your own territory and lead your troops across the border, you have entered cut-off terrain. When you are vulnerable on all four sides, you are at a strategically vital intersection. When you have penetrated deep into enemy territory, you are on critical terrain; when you have penetrated only a short distance, you are on marginal terrain. When your back is to heavily secured ground, and you face a narrow defile, you are on terrain vulnerable to ambush. When you have nowhere to turn, you are on terrain with no way out.

Therefore, on terrain where the troops are easily scattered, I would work to make them one of purpose; on marginal terrain, I would keep the troops together; on contested terrain, I would pick up the pace of our rear divisions;²⁰⁶ on intermediate terrain, I would pay particular attention to defense;²⁰⁷ at a strategically vital intersection, I would make sure of my alliances;²⁰⁸ on critical terrain, I would maintain a continuous line of provisions;²⁰⁹ on difficult terrain, I would continue the advance along the road; on terrain vulnerable to ambush, I would block off the paths of access and retreat; on terrain from which there is no way out, I would show our troops my resolve to fight to the death.

Thus the psychology of the soldier²¹⁰ is:

Resist when surrounded,
Fight when you have to,
And obey orders explicitly when in danger.

Unless you know the intentions of the rulers of the neighboring states, you cannot enter into preparatory alliances with them;²¹¹ unless you know the lay of the land (*hsing*)—its mountains and forests, its passes and natural hazards, its wetlands and swamps—you cannot deploy the army on it; unless you can employ local scouts, you cannot turn the terrain to your advantage.²¹² If an army is ignorant of even one of these several points, it is not the army of a king or a hegemon.²¹³

When the army of a king or hegemon attacks a large state, it does not allow the enemy to assemble his forces; when it brings its prestige and influence to bear on the enemy, it prevents his allies from joining with him. For this reason, one need not contend for alliances with the other states in the empire or try to promote one's own place vis-à-vis these states. If you pursue your own program, and bring your prestige and influence to bear on the enemy, you can take his walled cities and lay waste to his state.

Confer extraordinary rewards and post extraordinary orders, and you can command the entire army as if it were but one man. Give the troops their charges, but do not reveal your plans; get them to face the dangers, but do not reveal the advantages.²¹⁴ Only if you throw them into life-and-death situations will they survive; only if you plunge them into places where there is no way out will they stay alive. Only if the rank and file have plunged into danger can they turn defeat into victory.

Therefore, the business of waging war lies in carefully studying the designs of the enemy.²¹⁵

Focus your strength on the enemy
And you can slay his commander at a thousand *li*.

This is called realizing your objective by your wits and your skill.

For this reason, on the day a declaration of war is made, close off the passes, destroy all instruments of agreement, and forbid any further contact with enemy emissaries. Rehearse your plans thoroughly in the ancestral temple and finalize your strategy. When the enemy gives you the opening, you must rush in on him. Go first for something that he cannot afford to lose, and do not let him know the timing of your attack. Revise your strategy according to the changing posture of the enemy to determine the course and outcome of the battle.²¹⁶ For this reason,

At first be like a modest maiden,
And the enemy will open his door;
Afterward be as swift as a scurrying rabbit,
And the enemy will be too late to resist you.

INCENDIARY ATTACK

Master Sun said:

There are five kinds of incendiary attack: The first is called setting fire to personnel; the second, to stores; the third, to transport vehicles and equipment; the fourth, to munitions; the fifth, to supply installations.

In order to use fire there must be some inflammable fuel (*yin*), and such fuel must always be kept in readiness.²¹⁷ There are appropriate seasons for using fire, and appropriate days that will help fan the flames. The appropriate season is when the weather is hot and dry; the appropriate days are those when the moon passes through the constellations of the Winnowing Basket, the Wall, the Wings, and the Chariot Platform.²¹⁸ Generally these four constellations mark days when the winds rise.

With the incendiary attack, you must vary your response to the enemy according to (*yin*) the different changes in his situation induced by each of the five kinds of attack. When the fire is set within the enemy's camp, respond from without at the earliest possible moment. If in spite of the outbreak of fire, the enemy's troops remain calm, bide your time and do not attack. Let the fire reach its height, and if you can follow through, do so. If you cannot, stay where you are. If you are able to raise a fire from outside, do not wait to get inside, but set it when the time is right. If the fire is set from upwind, do not attack from downwind. If the wind blows persistently during the day, it will die down at night.²¹⁹ In all cases an army must understand the changes induced by the five kinds of incendiary attack, and make use of logistical calculations to address them.

He who uses fire to aid the attack is powerful;
He who uses water to aid the attack is forceful.²²⁰
Water can be used to cut the enemy off,
But cannot be used to deprive him of his supplies.²²¹

To be victorious in battle and win the spoils, and yet fail to exploit your achievement, is disastrous. The name for it is wasting resources.

Thus it is said:

The farsighted ruler thinks the situation through carefully;
The good commander exploits it fully.
If there is no advantage, do not move into action;
If there is no gain, do not deploy the troops;
If it is not critical, do not send them into battle.

A ruler cannot mobilize his armies in a rage; a commander cannot incite a battle in the heat of the moment.²²² Move if it is to your advantage; bide your time if it is not. A person in a fit of rage can be restored to good humor and a person in the heat of passion can be restored to good cheer, but a state that has perished cannot be revived, and the dead cannot be brought back to life. Thus the farsighted ruler approaches battle with prudence, and the good commander moves with caution. This is the way (*tao*) to keep the state secure and to preserve the army intact.

CHAPTER 13

USING SPIES

Master Sun said:

In general, the cost to the people and to the public coffers to mobilize an army of 100,000 and dispatch it on a punitive expedition of a thousand *li* is a thousand pieces of gold per day. There will be upheaval at home and abroad, with people trekking exhausted on the roadways and some 700,000 households kept from their work in the fields. Two sides will quarrel with each other for several years in order to fight a decisive battle on a single day. If, begrudging the outlay of ranks, emoluments, and a hundred pieces of gold, a commander does not know the enemy's situation, his is the height of inhumanity. Such a person is no man's commander, no ruler's counsellor, and no master of victory.

Thus the reason the farsighted ruler and his superior commander conquer the enemy at every move, and achieve successes far beyond the reach of the common crowd, is foreknowledge. Such foreknowledge cannot be had from ghosts and spirits, educed by comparison with past events, or verified by astrological calculations. It must come from people—people who know the enemy's situation.

There are five kinds of spies that can be employed:²²³ local (*yin*) spies, inside agents, double agents, expendable spies, and unexpendable spies. When the five kinds of spies are all active, and no one knows their methods of operation (*tao*), this is called the imperceptible web,²²⁴ and is the ruler's treasure.

Local spies are the enemy's own countrymen in our employ.

Inside agents are enemy officials we employ.

Double agents are enemy spies who report to our side.

Expendable spies are our own agents who obtain false information we have deliberately leaked to them, and who then pass it on to the enemy spies.

Unexpendable spies are those who return from the enemy camp to report.

Thus, of those close to the army command, no one should have more direct access than spies,²²⁵ no one should be more liberally rewarded than spies, and no matters should be held in greater secrecy than those concerning spies.

Only the most sagacious ruler is able to employ spies; only the most humane and just commander is able to put them into service; only the most sensitive and alert person can get the truth out of spies.

So delicate! So secretive! There is nowhere that you cannot put spies to good use. Where a matter of espionage has been divulged prematurely, both the spy and all those he told should be put to death.

In general terms, whether it is armies we want to attack, walled cities we want to besiege, or persons we want to assassinate, it is necessary to first know the identities of the defending commander, his retainers, counsellors, gate officers, and sentries. We must direct our agents to find a way to secure this information for us.

It is necessary to find out who the enemy has sent as agents to spy on us. If we take care of them (*yin*) with generous bribes, win them over and send them back,²²⁶ they can thus be brought into our employ as double agents. On the basis of what we learn from (*yin*) these double agents, we can recruit and employ local and inside spies. Also, from (*yin*) this information we will know what false information to feed our expendable spies to pass on to the enemy. Moreover, on what we know from (*yin*) this same source, our unexpendable spies can complete their assignments according to schedule. The ruler must have full knowledge of the covert operations of these five kinds of spies. And since the key to all intelligence is the double agent, this operative must be treated with the utmost generosity.

Of old the rise of the Yin (Shang) dynasty was because of Yi Yin who served the house of Hsia; the rise of the Chou dynasty was because of Lü Ya who served in the house of Shang.²²⁷ Thus only those farsighted rulers and their superior commanders who can get the most intelligent people as their spies are destined to accomplish great things. Intelligence is of the essence in warfare—it is what the armies depend upon in their every move.

14

Nine Configurations and Two Questions (Passages from the T'ung Tien)

THE KING OF WU ASKED SUN-TZU:

“On ‘dispersive terrain,’ the officers and troops are thinking of their families. As we cannot engage in battle with them, we must solidly defend our positions and not go forth. If the enemy attacks our small cities; plunders our fields; prevents us from gathering firewood; blocks our major roads; and awaits our emptiness and depletion to urgently advance and attack, what should we do?”

Sun-tzu replied: “When the enemy has deeply penetrated our capital region, putting numerous fortifications and cities behind them, their officers and men regard the army as their family, are focused in their intentions, and lightly enter into battle. On the contrary our troops are in their native state; they feel secure on their territory and embrace life. Therefore in battle formation they are not firm, when they engage in battle they are not victorious. We should assemble the people and gather the masses; collect the foodstuffs, livestock, and cloth; defend the walled cities and prepare to defend the passes; and dispatch light troops to sever their supply routes. If they are not able to provoke us into battle; their provisions fail to arrive; and there’s nothing in the countryside that they can plunder, their Three Armies will be in difficulty. Take advantage of the situation to entice them, and then we can be successful.

“If we want to engage in battle in the countryside we must rely upon the strategic configuration of power. Utilize ravines to establish ambushes. Lacking ravines, we must conceal ourselves in the weather, darkness, dusk, and fog, going forth where they will not expect it, suddenly striking their indolent forces. Then we will achieve results.”



The king of Wu asked Sun-tzu: “Suppose we have reached ‘light terrain’ and have just entered the enemy’s borders. Our officers and men are thinking of turning back. It’s hard to advance, but easy to withdraw. We do not yet have

ravines and defiles behind us, and the Three Armies are fearful. The commanding general wants to advance, the officers and troops want to retreat, so above and below are of different minds. The enemy is defending his walled cities and fortifications, putting his chariots and cavalry in good order. Some occupy positions to our fore, others strike to our rear. What should we do?”

Sun-tzu replied: “When we have reached ‘light terrain’ the officers and men are not yet focused because their task is entering the border, not waging battle. Do not approach his famous cities nor traverse his major roads. Feign doubt, pretend confusion. Show him that we are about to depart. Then initially select elite cavalry to silently enter their territory and plunder their cattle, horses, and other domestic animals. When the Three Armies observe that they were able to advance they will not be afraid. Divide our superior soldiers and have them secretly prepare ambushes. Should the enemy come up, strike without hesitation; if they do not come up, then abandon the ambushes and depart.”

He also said: “Suppose the army has entered the enemy’s borders. The enemy solidifies his fortifications without engaging in battle. Our officers and troops are thinking of returning home, but even if we want to retreat it would also be difficult. This is referred to as ‘light terrain.’ We should select elite cavalry to establish ambushes on the strategic roads. When we withdraw the enemy will pursue us;

when they come up, strike them.”



The king of Wu asked Sun-tzu: “On ‘contentious terrain’ suppose the enemy arrives first, occupies the strategic positions and holds the advantageous ones with selected troops and well-trained soldiers.

Some of them go forth, others assume defensive positions, thereby being prepared against our unorthodox tactics. What should we do?” Sun-tzu replied: “The rule for fighting on ‘contentious terrain’ is that one who yields will gain, while one who fights will lose. If the enemy has gained a position, then be careful not to attack it. Draw him away by pretending to go off. Set up flags, beat the drums, and move swiftly toward what he loves. Drag wood to raise clouds of dust, to befuddle his ears and eyes. Divide up our superior troops, secretly placing them in ambush. The enemy will certainly come forth to rescue the endangered target. What others want we will give them; what they abandon we will take. That is the Tao to fight for land they occupy first.

“If we arrive first and the enemy uses this strategy, then select fierce troops

to solidly defend our position. Have our light troops pursue the enemy's feigned departure, splitting some off to set up ambushes in the ravines and defiles. If the enemy turns about to fight, the troops in ambush on the flanks should rise up. This is the Tao to achieve complete victory."



The king of Wu asked Sun-tzu: "If on 'traversable terrain' where movement is easy we are about to isolate the enemy and we want to ensure he cannot advance, we must order our cities along the border to improve their defensive preparations, thoroughly sever all open roads, and secure the blockades at the passes. Suppose we have not planned for it beforehand, while the enemy has already made such preparations. They will be able to advance, but we will not be able to go forth. If our numbers are moreover equal, what then?"

Sun-tzu replied: "Since we cannot go forth but they can come up, we should split off some troops and conceal them. Our defenders should appear at ease and lax. Display incapability, and the enemy will definitely arrive. Establish ambushes, conceal ourselves in the grass, and go forth where he doesn't expect it. Then we can be successful."



The king of Wu asked Sun-tzu: "On 'focal terrain' one values being first. If the road is far and we mobilize after the enemy, even though we race our chariots and gallop our horses we will not be able to arrive first. What then?"

Sun-tzu replied: "Focal terrain is territory bordered by three states with roads open in the four directions. If we and the enemy oppose each other, while on the side there are other states, then one who would be referred to as 'first' must dispatch polite emissaries with generous gifts, to make alliances with the neighboring states. Establish friendly relations with them and secure their favor. Then even though our troops arrive after the enemy, the masses of the region will already be allied with us. With picked soldiers and welltrained troops they will block the advantageous positions and occupy them. They will sustain our military affairs and make our provisions substantial. Order our chariots and cavalry to go in and out with an attitude of respectful anticipation. We will have the support of the masses, while the enemy will have lost its partisans. The armies of the feudal states, like the horns of an ox, thundering the drums will attack en masse. The enemy will be startled and terrified, and no one will know

what they ought to do.”



The king of Wu asked Sun-tzu: “Suppose we have led the troops deep into ‘heavy terrain,’ bypassing a great many places so our supply routes are cut off or blocked. Suppose we want to return home but cannot get past their strategic configuration of power. If we want to forage on the enemy’s land and maintain our troops without loss, then what should we do?”

Sun-tzu replied: “Whenever we remain on heavy terrain the officers and troops will readily be courageous. If the supply routes are no longer open, then we must plunder to extend our provisions. Whatever the lower ranks obtain in grain or cloth must all be forwarded to the top, and those that collect the most will be rewarded. The warriors will no longer think about returning home.

“If you want to turn about and go forth, urgently make defensive preparations. Deepen the moats and raise the ramparts, showing the enemy our determination to remain indefinitely. The enemy will suspect we have an open route somewhere, and will remove themselves from the critical roads. Then we can order our light chariots to sally forth silently, the dust flying up, using the cattle and horses as bait. If the enemy goes forth, beat the drums and follow him. Prior to this secretly conceal some warriors in ambush, setting the time with them so that our forces within and without can launch a coordinated attack. The enemy’s defeat can then be known.”



The king of Wu asked Sun-tzu: “Suppose we enter ‘entrapping terrain’—mountains, rivers, ravines, and defiles. The road is difficult to follow; we have been on the move for a long time and the troops are tired. The enemy lies before us, and is ambushing our rear. His encampment occupies a position to the left, while they defend against our right. His superior chariots and skilled cavalry are pressing us on a constricted road. What then?”

Sun-tzu replied: “First have the light chariots advance about ten kilometers so that they and the enemy are observing each other. When our main army has reached their ravines and defiles, deploy some to go to the left, others to the right, while the commanding general conducts observations in all directions. Select vacuities and seize them, then have all our forces converge together on the road, stopping only when tired.”



The king of Wu asked Sun-tzu: “Suppose we have entered ‘encircled terrain,’ so that before us there is a strong enemy, and to our rear precipitous and difficult ground. The enemy has severed our supply lines, and is taking advantage of our moving disposition. If they beat their drums and yell but do not advance—in order to observe our capability—what should we do?”

Sun-tzu replied: “On ‘encircled terrain’ it is appropriate to block up all the openings, showing the troops that there is no place to go. Then they will regard the army as their family; the multitude will be of one mind; and the strength of the Three Armies will be united. Furthermore, steam food for several days, not displaying any fire or smoke, thus creating the appearance of decay, confusion, paucity of numbers, and weakness. When the enemy sees us their battle preparations will certainly be light.

“Exhort and incite our officers and troops, cause their anger to be aroused. Assume formation, deploying our superior troops in ambush in the ravines and defiles to the left and right. Beat the drums and go forth. If the enemy opposes us, fervently strike them, concentrating on breaking through. Fight in the front, consolidate in the rear, and set flanks out to the left and right.”



The king of Wu again asked: “Suppose the enemy is surrounded by our forces. They lie in ambush and make deep plans. They display enticements to us, they tire us with their pennants, moving all about as if in confusion. We do not know how to deal with this. What should we do?”

Sun-tzu replied: “Have a thousand men take up pennants, divide up, and block off the strategic roads. Have our light troops advance and try to provoke the enemy. Deploy our battle arrays but do not press them. Intercept them, but do not go off. This is the art of defeating stratagems.”



The king of Wu asked Sun-tzu: “Suppose our army has gone out beyond the borders, and our forces are arrayed in front of the enemy. The enemy’s forces arrive in great number, encircling us several layers deep. We want to suddenly burst out but all four sides are blocked. If we want to encourage our officers and incite our masses of troops, have them risk their lives and crush the encirclement, then how should we do it?”

Sun-tzu replied: “Make the moats deeper and the ramparts higher, showing that we are making preparations to defend our position. Be

quiet and still, without moving, to conceal our capability. Announce orders to the Three Armies to feign hopelessness. Kill your cattle and burn the supply wagons to feast our warriors. Completely burn all provisions, fill in the wells, level the stoves, cut off your hair, cast aside your caps, completely eliminate all thoughts of life, have no further plans. When the officers are determined to die, then have them polish their armor and sharpen their blades. When their *ch'i* has been united and their strength as one, some should attack the two flanks, thundering the drums and yelling fervently. The enemy will also become frightened, and no one will know how to withstand us. Elite troops and detached units should urgently attack their rear. This is the Tao by which to lose the road and seek life. Thus it is said that ‘one who is in difficulty but doesn’t make plans is impoverished; one who is impoverished and doesn’t fight is lost.’”

PART II

TEXT RECOVERED FROM THE YIN-CH'ÜEH-SHAN HAN DYNASTY STRIPS²²⁸

THE QUESTIONS OF WU

The King of Wu asked Master Sun: "Which of the six commanders²²⁹ who divided up the territory of the state of Chin were the first to perish? And which succeeded in holding on to their lands?"

Master Sun replied: "Fan and Chung-hang were the first to perish."

"Who was next?"

"Chih was next."

"And who was next?"

"Han and Wei were next. It was because Chao did not abandon the traditional laws that the state of Chin turned to him."

The King of Wu said: "Could you explain this to me?" Master Sun replied: "Indeed. In regulating the measurement of land area, Fan and Chung-hang took eighty square paces as a *yüan*, and took one hundred and sixty square paces as a *chen*, and then made five households their basic tax unit.²³⁰ The land area was small and the officials in office were many. With five households as the basic tax unit, the public coffers prospered. With the public coffers prospering and the officials in office many, the ruler became arrogant and his ministers wasteful. And in pursuit of great exploits they embarked on frequent wars. Thus I say they were the first to perish.

"[In regulating the measurement of land area, Chih took ninety square paces as a *yüan* and took one hundred and eighty square paces as a *chen*, and then made five households his basic tax unit. The land area was also small and the officials in office were also many. With five households as the basic tax unit, the public coffers prospered.] With the public coffers prospering and the officials in office many,

the ruler became arrogant and his ministers wasteful. And in pursuit of great exploits they embarked on frequent wars. Thus I say he was the next to perish after Fan and Chung-hang.

“In regulating the measurement of land area, Han and Wei took one hundred square paces as a *yüan*, and took two hundred square paces as a *chen*, and then made five households their basic tax unit. The land area was again small and the officials in office were again many. With five households as the basic tax unit, the public coffers prospered. With the public coffers prospering and the officials in office many, the ruler became arrogant and his ministers wasteful. And in pursuit of great exploits they embarked on frequent wars. Thus I say they were the next to perish after Chih.

“In regulating the measurement of land area, Chao took one hundred and twenty square paces as a *yüan*, and took two hundred and forty square paces as a *chen*, and so there were no new taxes forthcoming for the public coffers. With the public coffers empty and the officials in office few, the ruler was frugal and his ministers humble in their management of what was a prosperous people. Thus I say that he held on to his lands, and the whole state of Chin turned to him.”

The King of Wu said: “Excellent! The way (*tao*) of the True King is [*that he should*] love the people generously.” (284 characters)

CHAPTER 2

[THE FOUR CONTINGENCIES]²³¹

[*There are roadways not to be traveled, armies not to be attacked,*] walled cities not to be assaulted, territory not to be contested, and commands from the ruler [*not to be obeyed*].

That there are roadways not to be traveled refers to a roadway where if we penetrate only a short distance we cannot bring the operations of our vanguard into full play, and if we penetrate too deeply we cannot link up effectively with our rearguard. If we move, it is not to our advantage, and if we stop, we will be captured. Given these conditions, we do not travel it.

That there are armies not to be attacked refers to a situation in which the two armies make camp and face off. We estimate we have enough strength to crush the opposing army and to capture its commander. Taking the long view, however, there is some surprise advantage (*shih*) and clever dodge he has, so his army...its commander. Given these conditions, even though we can attack, we do not do so.

That there are walled cities not to be assaulted refers to a situation in which we estimate we have enough strength to take the city. If we take it, it gives us no immediate advantage, and having gotten it, we would not be able to garrison it. If we are [*lacking*],²³² the walled city must by no means be taken. If in the first instance we gain advantage, the city will surrender of its own accord; and if we do not gain advantage, it will not be a source of harm afterward. Given these conditions, even though we can launch an assault, we do not do so.

That there is territory not to be contested refers to mountains and

gorges . . . that are not able to sustain life . . . vacant. Given these conditions, do not contest it.

That there are commands from the ruler not to be obeyed means that if the commands of the ruler are contrary to these four contingencies, do not obey them . . . obey them. Where affairs . . . contingencies, one understands how to use troops.

THE YELLOW EMPEROR ATTACKS THE RED EMPEROR²³³

Master Sun said: [*The Yellow Emperor to the south attacked the Red Emperor, penetrated as far as . . .*] and did battle on the steppes of Mount Pan.²³⁴ Advancing with the *yin* conditions on his right, following the roadway, and keeping his back to strategic ground²³⁵ he exterminated the enemy and annexed his territory. For [*. . . years*] he gave his people respite, allowed the grains to ripen, and gave amnesty to the criminals.

Then to the east he attacked the [*Green*] Emperor, penetrated as far as Hsiang-p'ing, and did battle at P'ing. . . . Advancing with the *yin* conditions [*on his right*], following the roadway, and keeping his back to strategic ground, he exterminated the enemy [*and annexed his territory. For . . .*] years he gave his people respite, allowed the grains to ripen, and gave amnesty to the criminals.

Then to the north he attacked the Black Emperor, penetrated as far as Wu-sui, and did battle at . . . Advancing with the *yin* conditions on his right, following the roadway, [*and keeping his back to strategic ground, he exterminated the enemy and annexed his territory. For . . . years he gave his people respite, allowed the grains to ripen, and gave amnesty to the criminals*].

Then to the west he attacked the White Emperor, penetrated as far as Wu-kang, and did battle at [*. . . Advancing with the yin conditions on his right, following the roadway, and keeping his back to strategic ground, he exterminated the enemy and annexed*] his territory. Having defeated the four emperors he ruled over all under heaven. The violent . . . for the advantage of the empire, and the people under heaven from all four directions turned to him.

When King T'ang of Shang attacked King Chieh of Hsia, [*he penetrated*

as far as . . .], and did battle at Po-t'ien. Advancing with the *yin* conditions on his right, following the roadway, and keeping his back to strategic ground, he exterminated the enemy and annexed his territory.

When King Wu of Chou attacked King Chou of Shang, he penetrated as far as Shu-sui, and did battle on the fields of Mu. Advancing with the *yin* conditions on his right, following the roadway, [*and keeping his back to strategic ground, he exterminated the enemy*] and annexed his territory.

This one emperor and these two kings all realized the way (*tao*) of heaven, . . . the basic nature of the people. Thus . . .

CHAPTER 4

THE DISPOSITION [OF THE TERRAIN] II²³⁶

. . . in the disposition of terrain, east is left and west is [*right*] . . .

. . . head, on terrain that is flat, use the left, and the army . . .

. . . is terrain from which there is no way out. Places that produce grasses . . .

. . . the ground is hard, do not . . .

. . . [*natural*] net, natural well, and natural prison . . .²³⁷

. . . This is called an important advantage. If it is in front, this is called a concealed guard; if it is on the right, it is called a natural fortification; if it is on the left, it is called . . .

. . . what dwells on high is said to be the Constant Hall, . . . is said to be . . .

. . . follow, water on the left is said to be advantageous, and water on the right is said to be pent up . . .

. . . when the army enters into formation, regardless of the time of day, on the right flank to its back should be rises and hills, and on its left flank to its front should be waters and marshes. Those who follow . . .

. . . the measures needed to cope with the nine kinds of terrain, and the basic patterns of the human character must all be [*thoroughly investigated.*]²³⁸

[AN INTERVIEW WITH THE KING OF WU]²³⁹

[EDITOR'S NOTE: This passage is similar in content to the story recorded in the *Historical Records* biography of Sun Wu, where he has an interview with King Ho-lu of Wu and where he applies his military arts to discipline the court beauties. See the section entitled "Sun Wu as a Historical Person" in the Introduction above.

In comparing these two accounts, to the extent that they overlap, the language in the *Historical Records* biography is more summary, and also more polished. The account preserved in the archaeological dig is more didactic, portraying Sun Wu as a serious-minded teacher addressing King Ho-lu of Wu in a way reminiscent of Mencius's lecturing King Hui of Liang in the opening chapter of the *Mencius*. The surface difference between Sun Wu and Mencius is that Sun Wu espouses a positive position on "advantage" where Mencius condemns it. Sun Wu makes a distinction between pursuing "advantage" in warfare that redounds to the national good, and treating the brutality of warfare as a kind of royal blood sport. Mencius, on the other hand, rejects "advantage" as an unworthy consideration for a ruler when morality should be his first and major concern. Both Sun Wu and Mencius at a more fundamental level would agree that warfare, taking its toll in lives and property, is invariably a national sacrifice, and must be pursued only as a last and unavoidable resort.

We can speculate that the *Historical Records* might be a revised version of an earlier and more primitive account similar to the one preserved here.

The references to the “thirteen chapters” and *The Art of Warfare* indicate that both versions of this story are later than the core text.]

...to Master Sun’s guest house, the King of Wu asked: “I am fond of...the use of the military?” Again he inquired: “Sun...? My fondness for using the military...is using them properly and being fond of them.”

Master Sun replied: “Using the military is to gain the advantage; it is not a matter of being fond of it. Using the military is to...; it is not a matter of sport. If Your Majesty wants to ask about war in terms of fondness and sport, I dare not reply.”

King Ho-lu said: “I have never been told about the way of warfare; I dare not go after advantage and...”

Master Sun responded: “It is only important that it be what Your Majesty wants to do. We can use noble persons, we can use common folk, we can use your court ladies. We will train the men on the right and the ladies on the left...”

[*King Ho-lu*] said: “I want to use my court ladies.”

Master Sun replied: “Many of the court ladies lack the stamina. I would rather use...”

[*King Ho-lu replied:*] “...awe, what is there to regret?”

Master Sun said: “In that case, then from your palace please let me have..., to go to the outer hunting park to the east side of the capital..., and get them to form two lines...”

[*Master Sun*] said: “When they have not yet been drilled in their formations, they are not ready for parade. Once they have been drilled,... cannot excuse their difficulties. [*Could Your Majesty please go to the high balcony and wait there for us?... at midday I will ask for Your orders. Once they have been drilled in their formations, following commands... not... not difficult.*]”²⁴⁰

The ruler replied: “I consent.”

Master Sun used his chariot driver as [*his major*] and his arms bearer as field officer, and instructed the driver and the arms bearer, saying: “...”

[*Master Sun then turned to*] the court ladies and instructed them, saying: “Do you know which is your right hand?”

“[*We know*] it, [*they replied*].”

“Do you know your heart?”

“We know it,” they replied.

“Do you know your back?”

“We know it,” they replied.

[*“Do you know which is your left hand?”*

“We know it,” they replied.]

... “[*When I tell you ‘Left,’ follow the direction of*] your left hand. When I tell you ‘Front,’ follow the direction of your heart. When I tell you [*‘Back,’ follow the direction of your back. When I tell you ‘Right,’ follow the direction of your right hand.*]... it is your life. [*But my commands are to be obeyed. Those who do not obey will be executed...*]”²⁴¹ ... those who do not obey commands. Having circled seven times, fall out. On hearing the drums, advance...”

Going through and explaining his commands several times, he then drummed for them to advance, but the court ladies being all out of place, [*they broke into laughter*]... Striking the gong, he had them kneel. Again going through and explaining his commands several times, he drummed for them to advance, but the court ladies were all out of place, and broke into laughter. Three times he went through and explained his commands, but still his orders were not carried out. Master Sun then summoned his major and his field commander, and told them: “It says in *The Art of Warfare*: If one does not order them, or if one’s orders are not understood, it is the fault of the commander. If one has already issued orders and has explained them, it is the fault of the field officers. *The Art of Warfare* also says: In rewarding the good, begin from the lowliest; in punishing...”

[*King Ho-lu said:*] “... please excuse them.”

Master Sun replied: “The ruler...”

... [*Master Sun said:*] “Now if you direct them to assume a circular formation, their circle will satisfy the compass; if you direct them to assume a square formation, their square will satisfy the set square.”

...for six days King Ho-lu did not...

...Master Sun, bowing several times, arose and said: “You now know the way of warfare... far and near practice this doctrine, and take it as their constant rule. This unadorned doctrine is the way of the commander. For the masses... nothing is more exalted than authority. If the commander acts with authority over his men and enforces discipline among his officers, the entire army will have faith in his authority, and will conquer the enemy.”

... and use it, ... will get. As the thirteen chapters...

... the way elucidated and the attainments spoken of in the thirteen chapters is really what the commander told...

... Master Sun said: “In the meantime we will try them, and if they get it we will use them. There is nothing that is not...

... and try them ... getting ...

... to Master Sun, and said: “We have those within and without and the noble and the base.” Master Sun ...

“... I, your ruler, would like to practice it.” For the duration of the meal ...

“... the commander, I would not dare to not ...

PART III

TEXT RECOVERED FROM
LATER WORKS

CHAPTER 1

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE KING OF WU AND SUN WU²⁴²

(i)*

* The topic of this passage, “scattering terrain,” is defined in Chapter 11 above: “Where a feudal ruler does battle within his own territory, it is a terrain that permits the scattering of his troops.” Master Sun is explicit in his warning, “On scattering terrain do not fight.”

The King of Wu enquired of Sun Wu, saying: “If on ‘scattering terrain’ my officers and men are thinking of their homes, and cannot engage the enemy in battle, we must consolidate our defenses, and not go out against him. If the enemy then attacks our smaller walled cities, plunders our fields and meadowlands, prevents us from gathering our crops, blocks off our main thoroughfares, and, waiting until we have nothing left, attacks us in earnest, then what are we to do?”

Sun Wu replied: “If the enemy has penetrated deep into our territory, many of our walled cities and towns will be to his back. His officers and men will take the army as family, and with a united resolve, will think nothing of going to battle. But our troops are fighting on the home front, are comfortable on their native soil and have a great love of life. If you deploy them in a defensive position, they are not solid; if you send them into battle, they will not win.

“You should assemble a large number of troops, lay in ample provisions, stockpile cloth, fortify your walled cities, and guard the strategic passes. Dispatch light infantry to cut off the enemy’s supply lines. If he tries to provoke an engagement do not give it to him. His supply wagons will not get through, and the countryside will have nothing left for him to pillage. With his whole army in the grips of hunger, you can succeed in drawing him into a blind. If you engage him in battle, you must make the most of strategic advantage (*shih*). Making the most of strategic advantage (*shih*) means occupying the key passes and lying in ambush. Where there is no such terrain, hide in the shadows and the mist, go by way of places where it would never occur to him you would go, and attack him when he is off his guard.”

The King of Wu enquired of Sun Wu, saying: “We have reached marginal terrain, and have begun to press into enemy territory. Officers and men alike are thinking of the return home; it is hard to advance, and so easy to withdraw. With no passes or natural hazards to their backs, the

* The topic of this passage, “marginal terrain,” is defined in Chapter 11 above: “Where one has penetrated only barely into enemy territory, it is marginal terrain.” Master Sun is explicit in his warning, “Do not stay on marginal terrain.”

armies are fearful. The commanders want to advance, and their officers and men want to withdraw; superiors and subordinates are of two minds. Moreover, the enemy is amply defended. He has reinforced his walled cities and fortifications, and strengthened his chariot and mounted detachments. With some of his forces blocking our front and others attacking us from the rear, what are we to do?”

Sun Wu replied: “[*A situation in which our troops have entered enemy territory, the enemy is secure behind his walls and does not bring the battle to us, our officers and men are thinking of the return home, and for us to withdraw would be difficult indeed is called occupying marginal terrain. We should select our elite mounted troops and place them in ambush on the main thoroughfare. As we withdraw, the enemy will give us chase, and when they reach us, we attack them.*]²⁴³

When an army is on marginal terrain, the officers and men are not one in spirit, they are doing what they must only because they are on enemy ground, and are going into battle without the heart for it. Therefore, do not approach the enemy’s major walled cities, and do not advance on his main thoroughfares. Set up decoys and feign confusion, and give the enemy the impression we are about to quit our position. Then select our elite mounted troops, and send them on ahead into enemy territory under a cloak of silence to seize cattle, horses, and livestock. When our armies see the spoils, they will be ready to advance without fear. Separate off our best troops and lay them secretly in ambush. If the enemy comes, attack him in full fury; if he does not, break camp and quit the position.”

(iii)*

The King of Wu enquired of Sun Wu, saying: “The enemy has been first to reach contested terrain, has taken up key strategic positions and has secured the advantageous ground. In an effort to check our mounted detachments, he then dispatches some of his select troops and crack offi-

* The topic of this passage, “contested terrain,” is defined in Chapter 11 above: “Ground that gives us or the enemy the advantage in occupying it is contested terrain.” Master Sun is explicit in his warning, “Do not attack the enemy on contested terrain.”

cers to attack us while others are kept defending their position. What are we to do?”

Sun Wu replied: “The principle governing contested terrain is that if you let the enemy have it, you can get it, but if you try to get it, you will lose it. If the enemy has occupied the contested terrain, move carefully and do not attack him. Feign retreat and withdraw. Set up the flags and sound the drums, and hasten to the enemy’s most vital points. Drag brush behind the troops and raise the dust to confuse the ears and eyes of the enemy. Separate off our best troops and lay them secretly in ambush. The enemy must come out to the rescue. What he wants we give him, and what he abandons we take. This is the way of contested terrain.

“If we are first to arrive, and the enemy tries to use this strategy on us, select out our finest troops and reinforce the defenses of our position, and send our light infantry in pursuit. Deploy a detachment to lay in ambush in some difficult stretch of terrain, and when the enemy comes out to meet our pursuing force, our concealed troops launch an attack from both sides. This is the way to take the complete victory.”

(iv)*

The King of Wu enquired of Sun Wu, saying: “On intermediate terrain, we want to cut off the enemy line and prevent him from advancing. We must preserve our border walled cities intact and fortify their de-

* The topic of this passage, “intermediate terrain,” is defined in Chapter 11 above: “Ground accessible to both sides is intermediate terrain.” Master Sun is explicit in his warning, “Do not get cut off on intermediate terrain.”

fenses, make a deep cut in the main road and reinforce our hazards and blockades. What if we have not planned in advance and the enemy is already prepared, so he can advance at will and yet we cannot get away? Where the numerical strength of our armies is about the same, what are we to do?”

Sun Wu replied: “Since we cannot leave and yet the enemy can come at will, we deploy a detachment and secrete the men in ambush. We are vigilant in our defenses, but give the enemy the impression we are not up to battle. Then when the enemy arrives, our troops in ambush will appear from hiding places where it would never occur to the enemy they would.”

(v)*

* The topic of this passage, the “strategically vital intersection,” is defined in Chapter 11 above: “The territory of several neighboring states at which their borders meet is a strategically vital intersection. The first to reach it will gain the allegiance of the other states of the empire.” Master Sun is explicit in his injunction, “Form alliances with the neighboring states at strategically vital intersections.”

The King of Wu enquired of Sun Wu, saying: “The strategically vital intersection must be reached before the enemy forces, but our road is long and we have gotten under way after the enemy. If, even with racing our chariots and galloping our horses, we cannot possibly reach the intersection before the enemy, what are we to do?”

Sun Wu replied: “The territories of our neighboring rulers border on three sides and our thoroughfares go in all four directions. Our military strength is about the same as the enemy’s, but there are other neighboring states involved. What is meant by arriving first is we must send lavish gifts by swift envoys and effect alliances with our neighboring states, so that relationships are intimate and there is mutual good will. Even if our armies arrive after the enemy, we are more numerous by virtue of these alliances. Dispatch our select troops and crack officers to check enemy operations and get the upper hand. People sympathetic to our troops will provide us with the full complement of supplies and provisions, and will act as look-outs for our chariots and mounted troops in their comings and goings. While we have abundant support, the enemy will have lost all those who might have sided with him. The neighboring states will be one flank in our united front, the sound of our drums will rock the heavens, and we will attack as one. The enemy will be alarmed, and will not know how to respond.”

(vi)*

The King of Wu enquired of Sun Wu, saying: “Our forces have pushed deep into critical terrain and have passed by many of the enemy’s cities and towns. Our supply lines have been cut off and stopped. If we try to go

* The topic of this passage, “critical terrain,” is defined in Chapter 11 above: “When an army has penetrated deep into enemy territory, and has many of the enemy’s walled cities and towns at its back, it is on critical terrain.” Master Sun is explicit in his injunction, “Plunder the enemy’s resources on critical terrain.”

back now, there is no way we will make it. If we try to feed off of the enemy, he is sure to put up a fight. What then are we to do?”

Sun Wu replied: “Generally when an army has occupied critical terrain, the officers and men rely on courage in pressing ahead. If the supply lines are broken, they plunder to provision themselves. If the rank and file get grain or cloth, it is all handed over to the superiors. When many receive rewards, the men will have no thought of going back. If we intend to launch another attack, we must be thoroughly prepared with deep ditches and high barriers, giving the enemy the impression it will be a long and protracted battle. If the enemy doubts our capacity to move on his roads, he himself will recall his troops from guarding vital arteries. Under a cloak of silence we can then dispatch a detachment of light chariots at the quick. Under the cover of a cloud of dust, we can use horses and cattle to bait him. If the enemy sends his troops out, sound the drums and go after him. Conceal our troops, and when the enemy has walked into the ambush, fall on him from all sides. His defeat is assured.”

(vii)*

The King of Wu enquired of Sun Wu, saying: “We have entered difficult terrain and, with the mountains and rivers, passes and natural hazards, the road is hard to follow. We have been pressing on for a long time,

* The topic of this passage, “difficult terrain,” is defined in Chapter 11 above: “Mountains and forests, passes and hazards, wetlands and swamps, and any such roads hard to traverse constitute difficult terrain.” Master Sun is explicit in his injunction, “Press ahead on difficult terrain.”

and our troops are exhausted. The enemy occupies the ground ahead, and has also set an ambush behind us. He has established camp to the left of our forces, and has set up defenses against our right flank. His fine chariots and elite mounted troops threaten our precarious route. What are we to do?”

Sun Wu replied: “First dispatch our light chariots to advance about ten *li* in front of the main force to keep an eye on the enemy. Prepare to engage the enemy in battle amid the passes and natural hazards of this difficult terrain. Divert the troops to the left and to the right. On the signal of the high command, select vulnerable targets and take them, with all of the men regrouping back at the main road. Break off the operation once the troops are exhausted.”

(viii)*

* The topic of this passage, “terrain vulnerable to ambush,” is defined in Chapter 11 above: “Ground that gives access through a narrow defile and where exit is tortuous, allowing an enemy in small numbers to attack our main force, is terrain vulnerable to ambush.” Master Sun is explicit in his injunction, “Devise contingency plans on terrain vulnerable to ambush.”

The King of Wu enquired of Sun Wu, saying: “We have entered terrain vulnerable to ambush. Directly in our path is a formidable enemy, and to our back are natural hazards and rough terrain. The enemy has cut off our supply lines, and wants us to think our best advantage lies in flight. He sounds his drums and raises a hue and cry, yet does not advance on us, trying to gauge our battle strength. What are we to do?”

Sun Wu replied: “On terrain vulnerable to ambush, we must seal off the passes. If we show the men there is nowhere to go, they will take their fellows-at-arms as family, everyone will be united in spirit, and the entire army will fight as one. Prepare several days’ provisions at once, but do not let the enemy see the fire and smoke, thus creating the impression that our forces are run-down, disorderly, and few in number. The enemy forces will take our measure, and in preparing against us are sure to think we are of little consequence. Arouse the officers and men, and rally them to rise up in fury against the enemy. Detail our superior fighting men in attack formation and in ambush. With defiles and natural hazards on all sides, sound the battle drums and launch the attack. If the enemy forces offer resistance, lash out at them suddenly and in full fury. Those on the front line carry the fight and those behind buttress them, working together to ram the enemy position.”

The King of Wu again enquired: “The enemy has fallen into our ambush, but takes cover and plans his strategy carefully. He offers us some concessions, encircles us with his standards, and mills about as though his ranks are in disorder. We do not know what to make of it. What are we to do?”

Sun Wu replied: “Dispatch a thousand men to take care of the standard bearers, send a detachment to block off the main arteries, and send the light chariots ahead to harass the enemy. Deploy our main force in battle formation, but do not pounce on him. Join him in battle and do not withdraw. This is the way to defeat his strategy.”

The King of Wu enquired of Sun Wu, saying: “Our army has moved across our own borders and has entered enemy territory. The enemy arrives in force, and throws a cordon around us several times over. We want to break through his lines and escape, but the enemy has blocked off the roadways in all directions. We want to arouse the officers and inflame the rank and file so our men are willing to sacrifice their lives in bursting through the blockade. What are we to do?”

Sun Wu replied: “Gouge out deep ditches and pile up high barriers, showing the enemy we are prepared to defend our ground. Lie still and motionless, thereby concealing our strength from the enemy. Solemnly

inform the entire army that our situation is a last-ditch fight to the death. Slaughter the oxen and burn the wagons to feast our troops, cook up all of the remaining provisions, and fill in and flatten our wells and cooking holes. Shave your head, throw away your official cap, and give up any thought of living. The commander has no further strategies; the officers and men are armed with their death resolve. At this, wipe down the armor, sharpen the blades, unite the men in spirit and strength, and launch the attack on two flanks. With the thundering of our drums and our ferocious battle cries, the enemy will be terrified, and will not know how to stop us. Divide our crack troops into two divisions to smash through enemy lines and launch a stinging attack on his rear lines. This is what is called snatching life from a disaster of our own making. Thus it is said:

To fail to think fast when surrounded by the enemy
is to have your back pressed to the wall;
And to fail to take the battle to the enemy when
your back is to the wall is to perish.

King Wu again enquired: “What do we do if it is we who have surrounded the enemy?”

Sun Wu replied: “Our mountains and valleys, high crags and defiles, are difficult for the enemy to traverse. His predicament is called the invader with his back to the wall. As for how to attack him: Conceal our troops in unlikely hiding places, and give the enemy a way out so he thinks there is a road to safety. He will pass through the corridor in an effort to save himself, and is sure to have no heart for battle. Take this opportunity and attack him, and even though he may be more numerous, you are sure to smash him.”

(x)*

* The topic of this passage, “terrain from which there is no way out,” is defined in Chapter 11 above: “Ground on which you will survive only if you fight with all your might, but will perish if you fail to do so, is terrain with no way out.” Master Sun is explicit in his injunction, “On terrain from which there is no way out, take the battle to the enemy.”

The King of Wu enquired of Sun Wu, saying: “We occupy terrain from which there is no way out, and our supply lines have already been cut. The enemy ambushes us on the rough terrain, and we can neither advance nor retreat. What are we to do?”

Sun Wu replied: “Put our stores to the torch and use up whatever goods we have left. In flame the officers and incite the rank and file so they have no thought of living. With war drums and battle cries mounting to the heavens, advance on the enemy without looking back. Enter the fray having resolved to win or die, being fully aware that the only alternative to death is to do what is needed in the struggle.

“If it is the enemy who is on terrain from which there is no way out, and the morale and courage of his officers and men is at its height, the way to attack him is this: Be responsive to the enemy’s moves and do not take him head on. Secretly deploy troops to safeguard our advantages, cut off the enemy’s supply lines, and watch out for the surprise ambush. Go into hiding where we cannot be seen, dispatch the archers and crossbowmen, and have them all hold their ground.”

The King of Wu enquired of Sun Wu, saying: “The enemy occupies the mountains and passes, and constantly uses his terrain advantage against us. He moreover has all he needs of supplies and provisions, and though we harass him he does not come out. And as soon as he sees an opening, he breaks through and pillages. What can we do about this?”

Sun Wu replied: “Divide up and deploy the army to safeguard our critical points, and prepare against the enemy thoroughly and with utmost vigilance. Covertly explore the enemy’s situation, and wait in readiness

for the least sign of negligence. Try to tease him out with seeming opportunities, and put an end to his herding and gathering so that for an extended period he brings in nothing. He will change his posture of his own accord. Wait for him to leave his stronghold, and then snatch what he covets the most. Though the enemy might occupy strategic passes and terrain, we are still able to smash him.”

CHAPTER 2

SUN WU DISCUSSES
THE COMMANDER

(i)

The military treatise of Sun Wu says: “Before the army’s watering hole has been reached, the commander does not speak of thirst; before the fires have food on them, the commander does not speak of hunger.”²⁴⁴

(ii)

employs men of talent and wisdom, his secret plans will work; if his rewards and punishments are invariably honored, his men will give their all; if the morale and courage of his troops is heightened, they will of themselves be increasingly martial and intimidating; if his command is unified, the men will serve their commander alone.”²⁴⁵

Master Sun said: “The traits of the true commander are: wisdom, humanity, respect, integrity, courage, and dignity. With his wisdom he humbles the enemy, with his humanity he draws the people near to him, with his respect he recruits men of talent and character, with his integrity he makes good on his rewards, with his courage he raises the morale of his men, and with his dignity he unifies his command. Thus, if he humbles his enemy, he is able to take advantage of changing circumstances; if the people are close to him, they will be of a mind to go to battle in earnest; if he

(iii)

(iv)

Sun-tzu: The Art of Warfare states: “Where men are committed to fight to the death, their superiors are able to make good use of them. Even when they are taking it easy and are at their leisure, commands will still be carried out.”²⁴⁶

Sun-tzu: The Art of Warfare states: “Exalt him and he is not arrogant; commission him and he does not act autocratically; support him and he does not conspire; threaten him and he is not afraid. Thus the actions of the able commander are as incorruptible as a jade insignium.”²⁴⁷

*Sun-tzu: The Secret Essentials of the Art of Warfare*²⁴⁸ states: “Because the able commander plans and calculates like a hungry man, he is invincible in battle and unconquerable in the attack.”²⁴⁹

*Sun-tzu: A Discussion of the Art of Warfare*²⁵⁰ states: “It takes a person of civil virtue to bring peace to the empire; it takes a person of martial virtue to quell disorder in the land. The expert in using the military has three basic strategies that he applies: The best strategy is to attack the enemy at the level of wisdom and experience; the second is to expose the injustice of the enemy’s claims; and the last is to attack the enemy’s battle position (*shih*).”²⁵¹

SUN WU DISCUSSES
DEPLOYING THE ARMY

Master Sun said: “The traits of the true commander are: courage, wisdom, humanity, and integrity.”²⁵²

Master Sun said: “The commander will surely choose those who are most fortunate.”²⁵³

Master Sun said: “On marching through terrain with natural defiles, grave mounds, and the ruins of old walls, the army cannot tarry.”²⁵⁴

(ii)

(iii)

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Sun-tzu: The Art of Warfare states: “The forests lie thick and tangled, the vegetation is lush and overgrown.”²⁵⁵

Master Sun said: “Therefore it is said: Terrain covered with thick brush and lush foliage is used for escape and for hiding; ground marked with deep valleys, defiles, and natural hazards is used to ward off chariots and mounted troops; narrow passes and mountain forests are used for the few to attack the many; terrain covered with marshy jungle and dark thickets is used to conceal one’s position.”²⁵⁶

THE PROGNOSTICATIONS
*OF SUN-TZU*²⁵⁸

(i)

Master Sun said: “Lowlands covered with quagmires and labyrinths.
are called natural wells.”²⁵⁷

(i)

The Prognostications of Sun-tzu says: “The combined army is about to set off. When the standards and banners are unfurled, they flutter in the direction the army is to go. This means Heaven is sending it on its way. It must strike quickly and will capture the enemy’s high command.

The combined army is about to set off, and the standards and banners droop limply as though rain-soaked. This means Heaven has opened up a deluge on them, and its officers will be lost.

The combined army is about to set off, and the standards and banners flap around every which way on their staffs, without blowing in any particular direction. This army will not return.

The combined army is about to assume battle formation, and it rains in torrents. This is an army awash. It should not go to battle in formation.

The combined army is about to enter battle. Clouds gather above that are flaming red in color. Do not use battle formation in engaging the enemy. The first one to deploy in battle formation will not retrace his steps.

The combined army has just set off. Strong winds blow up in front of the troops. If the winds sweep to the right and cut off the advancing forces, the army’s commanders will perish; if the winds sweep to the right behind the troops, the army will capture provisions.”²⁵⁹

Master Sun said of those cloudlike vapors that govern a situation that they are neither cloud nor smoke nor mist. Where they take the shape of birds or animals, it is auspicious for the aggressor and a bad omen for the defending forces.²⁶⁰

SUN WU DISCUSSES THE “EIGHT-
DIVISION FORMATION”²⁶¹

(i)

Master Sun’s “eight-division formation” includes the armored personnel-style chariots.²⁶²

(ii)

The *Sun-tzu: The Art of Warfare* states: “The extended battle formation deploys winged flanks.”²⁶³

The *Eight-Division Formation Diagrams*²⁶⁴ states: “In deploying in this formation, make the rear the front line, and the front line the rear. It has four heads and eight tails, so wherever the enemy strikes is its head. And when the enemy bursts through the lines, the head and tail can both come to the rescue.”²⁶⁵

THE CLASSIC OF THE
THIRTY-TWO RAMPARTS²⁶⁶

(i)

Redeploy the army and redistribute the banners in response to the enemy's intentions. Move the troops under a cloak of silence into their battle formation, and lay detachments in ambush. If the enemy is last to arrive at the battlefield, be first to launch the attack. If you use this battle strategy, you will defeat him.

HAN DYNASTY BAMBOO STRIPS
FROM TA-T'UNG COUNTY²⁶⁷

(i)

Master Sun said: "As for these thirteen chapters . . ."²⁶⁸

(ii)

"How do we take the victory?" Master Sun replied, "...

(iii)

(v)

Cited in *Battle Ordinances*, Master Sun says: “To be able to face three . . .”

(iv)

Cited in *Ordinances for Joining the Enemy in Battle*, Master Sun says: “On the battlefield exalt concerted achievement, thereby . . .”

Cited in [. . .] *Ordinances*, Master Sun says: “As the army advances concern yourself if the war chariots break ranks, and . . . each other . . .”

MISCELLANEOUS

(i)

The Master said: “In deploying the troops concern yourself if the formation is not solid, for if the formation is not solid, the front line will be crushed, and . . .”

The *Sun-tzu: The Art of Warfare* states: “Stable, it is like a mountain peak; at rest, it is like a deep abyss.”²⁶⁹

(ii)

(iv)

Master Sun said: “Weak and strong, short and long, are mixed together in their use.”²⁷⁰

(iii)

[Master Sun] went on to say: “At a distance, use your crossbow; at close quarters, use your hand weapons. Hand weapons and crossbow are of mutual aid.”²⁷¹

[Master Sun] went on to say: “Use a ratio of ten infantry to each mounted soldier in attacking.”²⁷²

Master Sun said: “A city might have walls of iron and be surrounded by moats of boiling water, but if it is inadequately provisioned, even a Chiang T’ai-kung or a Mo Ti would be unable to defend it.”²⁷³